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TEXTBOOKS AND PUBLISHERS

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THE PUBLISHER'S VIEWPOINT

One purpose of the publishing business is to earn money, but if that were the only end the best publishers would not be in it. The business must be reasonably profitable, of course, otherwise it could not be continued, but the financial rewards alone are not sufficient to command the efforts of the type of publisher who makes his business a success not only commercially but educationally as well.

The successful publisher is more than a mere manufacturer and distributor of books. He is a constructive worker in the educational field. He gives attention to the manufacture of books because that is the material foundation of the work of the spirit in which he is engaged. He gives attention to the distribution of books because the extent of distribution is not only a measure of the success of his business financially considered, but it is also a measure of the influence of the educational ideas and ideals that he seeks to extend through his books.

The publisher knows the story of the use and the influence of the textbook in the past as well as in the present. He knows that so far as the facts taught are concerned the textbook has been more influential in American schools than all other factors combined, and this is likely to be true for many years to come. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the textbook may not, in most cases, have as much influence as the teacher in determining the bent of the pupil's character. The exceptional teacher will teach well with any book or with none. The

average teacher follows the textbook more or less blindly, and it is the book rather than the teacher that determines what the pupil will get of fact or inspiration. Knowledge of this situation stimulates the publisher to do his best in making his textbooks of such character that they may contribute as much as possible to the intellectual and spiritual life of the schools.

The publisher studies carefully the books that prove successful, for they express better than anything else the judgment of teachers as to what constitutes a good book. Under existing conditions in our schools, books must be made for teachers almost as much as for pupils, for without the teacher's approval of a book, the pupil will never have an opportunity to use it. Of course, the teacher's judgment of a book is based in part upon what he thinks is best for the pupil, but it is based also upon the ease with which it seems to lend itself to classroom use. Knowledge of the character of existing successful books, coupled with knowledge of conditions and tendencies in the educational field, constitutes the best guide in the planning of new books.

The publisher is a close student of tendencies in national sentiment and life especially as they are related to the educational field. For him the statement that national ideals reflect themselves in the schools is not a mere academic dictum but a principle of far reaching importance. He sees the converse also, that the things taught in the schools help to make or mar the national life. He saw, for example, that the Great War would bring as one of its indirect consequences, a greatly increased demand for the study of the Spanish language in the schools, and therefore it would be worth while commercially to have Spanish texts on his lists. But he saw also that in contributing to the successful study of Spanish, he would be helping the United States to become better acquainted with a great group of sister nations—an international service and an ideal worth striving for. He saw a few years ago that the

renewed interest in rural life would be followed by a call for textbooks in agriculture, and he set about providing these books knowing full well that if he secured the right kind he would not only increase his business prosperity but he would at the same time be making a positive contribution to the national welfare. Similarly he sees that in providing good books in the field of the social studies, an increased demand for which has grown out of the war, he is encouraging a more intelligent patriotism. And in doing these things he sees his work not merely as a commercial enterprise but as a public service.

The publisher finds his greatest satisfaction in anticipating the next step in educational content and method, and in having ready the textbook that helps the schools to take that step easily and naturally. It would be possible to cite many instances in which books were successful commercially simply because they were the embodiment of material and a method for which teachers and the public at the time of the publication of these books, were more or less blindly groping.

The knowledge of educational conditions which the publisher possesses is not a mere matter of inspiration on his part, although no one can hope to be highly successful in this field who does not have a genius for his work just as a reporter has a nose for news. It comes as a result of years of study and experience in his chosen field. He gives, or if you prefer, he sells to society the expert knowledge and skill that he has gained in the making of books, just as truly as the trained surgeon sells to society the knowledge and skill that he has gained in a thousand operations, many of which have been successful. And who shall say that one service is higher than the other?

The publisher is not dependent upon his own experiences and observation alone for his information. Through his editorial department and his field agents he is in constant touch

with the best that is being thought and done in the educational field. These assistants consist for the most part of capable men and women who have had successful experience as teachers and school administrators. They are intimately acquainted with the work of the schools and with the leaders in their respective territories. They know the men who are writing books or who ought to be doing it. So well informed are they that many teachers and administrators welcome their visits because of the information they bring concerning means, methods, and successful accomplishments in the educational field. While they are selling books and counseling with teachers they are gathering and sifting information which is of material assistance to the publisher in planning for new books and making needed revisions of old ones.

After this preliminary work on the part of the publisher, he is ready to begin his real task, which is to find the book that the schools and the nation need. This he may do in any of three ways. First, the manuscript may come to him uninvited and unannounced, straight from the sanctum sanctorum of some educational prophet or artist or genius—call him what you will—who has wrought it out of his own life experience and sent it to the publisher with a silent prayer that it may be thought worthy of publication. Some of the best manuscripts are produced in this way. Occasionally they are published just as presented, more often with slight revision made as the result of conference between author and publisher. If authors realized how eagerly and carefully the publisher scans *every* manuscript with the hope of finding the occasional treasure, they would not hesitate to submit an unsolicited manuscript for judgment absolutely on its merits. Happy indeed are both author and publisher if the latter recognizes the visiting angel and brings the book to the bar of public judgment and the field of public service. But unhappy is the publisher, at least, if he fails to recognize the angel in the

stranger guest and turns it away to a more discerning competitor. The relatively few books of this kind are a rich find for the publisher. He deserves no particular credit for them except in that he recognizes their merit and publishes them in attractive form. It may be added here, however, that in rejecting inferior manuscripts, scarcely less than in accepting good ones, the publisher performs a public service.

But unfortunately the best manuscripts do not usually drop as manna from heaven. They must be diligently sought for. The author who has written such a manuscript or, as is more likely, who can write it, must be found. Many an author needs the stimulus of an invitation from the publisher and contact with the publisher's ideals before he will do the best work of which he is capable. Not always, but yet often, the publisher sees the field for a book of a certain type before the teachers who are working in that field are aware of it. Then it becomes his problem to find the author who can do the work. If he succeeds, he will have helped himself, the author, and the cause of education in that particular field. The influence of the publisher in starting an author on the right track may be illustrated by the fact that one of the most successful and widely used textbooks in geography in the United States was the outgrowth of a suggestion made by the publisher to the author. The publisher could not write the book himself, but he told the author his idea of how he thought the subject of geography should be presented, and the latter worked it over into a book that proved both profitable commercially and of great influence educationally. One of the most successful textbooks writers in the country, a man of exceptionally high standing in the educational field, says that he would rather have the reaction of a certain publisher on any proposed plan for a book than to have the judgment of any of his professional colleagues in the more limited educational field. The success of a publisher in finding the right author is dependent upon

the accuracy of his knowledge of the need, the extent of his acquaintance among possible authors, and the cleverness of his own judgment of men. He does not always pick the successful author, in which case neither he, nor the author, nor the public is better off. But he gives attention to all the factors in the case knowing full well that if he succeeds, he will have given the author opportunity to perform a valuable public service with some profit to both author and publisher.

There is a third form of authorship that grows out of the fact that a successful book is less often the product of individual genius than it is of broad experience and a constant checking up of the various factors involved. In a book written for the elementary schools, it is often desirable to have a combination of the point of view of the classroom teacher and that of the school supervisor or administrator. In the secondary school field, the work of the college professor gives scholarly accuracy and dignity to a book, but it is often necessary to have his work tested and checked up by a teacher of practical experience in the secondary school whose knowledge of school conditions and the high school mind enables him to avoid the pitfalls into which the learned professor unconsciously falls. The principle involved here is illustrated by the attitude of the head of a department of mathematics in one of the great Western universities a few years ago who said he felt that his work in the field of advanced mathematics had made him less competent to teach the freshman subjects simply because he could not then appreciate the difficulties of students in mastering elementary facts and principles. Some of the best textbooks in the secondary school field have been produced by the combined effort of a college professor and a teacher in the secondary school. Recognizing the limitations of the individual point of view, his own included, the publisher is constantly on the lookout for possible collaborations that promise success of the highest order.

Even after the publisher has studied the field carefully himself, has made use of all the information gathered by his assistants, and has consulted with the best experts he can find in any particular field, there is abundant room for the exercise of courage in putting out a new book. The final test comes only when it is given to the public. The combined efforts of publisher and author are not always successful; some essential factor has been overlooked; the effort is unsuccessful financially and apparently from the educational point of view as well. Even in such cases the publisher has the assurance that he has given the educational public an opportunity to test an ideal which not only seemed worthy to him but which was approved by the most expert judgment in the field concerned. He knows that although this particular effort has failed because it was too far in advance of public sentiment or because of some other uncalculated factor, it may nevertheless serve as a stimulus which will make a later effort of his own or some other publisher successful.

Perhaps it is fair to summarize this brief presentation of the publisher's point of view by saying that he is not merely a manufacturer and distributor of books for material gain; he is an idealist, a constructive worker in the field of education, ambitious to do his share in putting into the schools of the nation the ideas and ideals which express the nation's best thought now and which should later be wrought into the national life through the influence of schools. He represents a large business organization, which he is ready to place at the service of any author who can convince him that he has a message for the schools, and through the schools for the nation. And finally he stands ready to risk his reputation and financial resources to test the validity of approved ideals and methods in textbooks as a means to the constant improvement of the nation's educational life.